

# A Late Prehistoric Analog for "Cuspidiform" Petroglyphs

*James L. Murphy and Jeff Carskadden*

## ABSTRACT

An unusual incised, shell-tempered ceramic sherd from the Late Woodland Philo II site, Muskingum County, Ohio, bears designs remarkably similar to numerous aboriginal rock-carvings in the Ohio Valley. The occurrence of this sherd in an unquestionable Fort Ancient context suggests that at least some of this form of petroglyph are Late Woodland in age. The designs on the sherd also support the contention that at least some of the petroglyphs represent arrows rather than bird tracks.

## Introduction

Excavations conducted by Jeff Carskadden and James Morton at the Late Woodland Philo II site, Muskingum County, Ohio, have yielded the unusual pottery sherd illustrated in Figure 1. The sherd was found in a refuse pit containing typical Philo Punctate and other incised ceramics (Gartley, Carskadden, and Morton 1976). A typical Philo Punctate sherd and two other incised sherds from the same refuse pit are shown in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. Radiocarbon dates available from the Philo II site and the nearby and closely related Richards site indicate that Philo II was inhabited from approximately A.D. 1230 to A.D. 1260, slightly earlier than the Richards site (Morton 1977).

## Discussion

Designs such as those carved on this Philo Plain sherd are frequently found on petroglyph sites and are usually interpreted as representing bird tracks. Cases in point are the famous Barnesville Track Rocks (Whittlesey 1877; Swauger 1974) of Belmont County, Ohio, (very close to the Muskingum Valley Philo sites), the peripatetic Turkeyfoot Rock (Keller 1952),

which has been moved from location to location in Lucas County, Ohio, and the Newark or Hanover tracks rocks (Whittlesey 1877; Murphy 1977) of Licking County, Ohio.

A previously unpublished but typical "track rock" is illustrated in Figure 4. It was photographed at Canters Caves, Jackson County, Ohio, probably in the 1920s, when the shelter was excavated first by local amateurs and subsequently by The Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society (Shetrone 1928). No mention of this particular petroglyph has been found in the literature, and it is not known whether the carving still remains at the site; however, a snapshot exists in the Jackson County file, Department of Archaeology, The Ohio Historical Society.

Brinton (1884) appears to be the first to have suggested that such designs represent arrows rather than bird tracks. Swauger (1974) notes that these may be arrows or bird tracks but are too generalized to be identified as *turkey* tracks. Supporting interpretation as bird tracks are the occurrence of such carvings with representations of the tracks of other animals and human footprints, as at the Barnesville petroglyph site and the Independence Stone, Cuyahoga County. Also, several of the bird-like carvings found at Smith's Ferry, Pennsylvania,

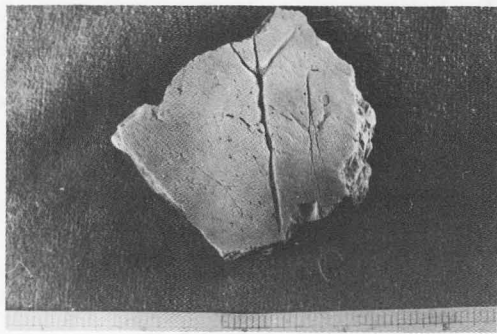


Fig. 1. Shell-tempered sherd from the Philo II site with incised cuspidiform designs. Bar scale in inches.

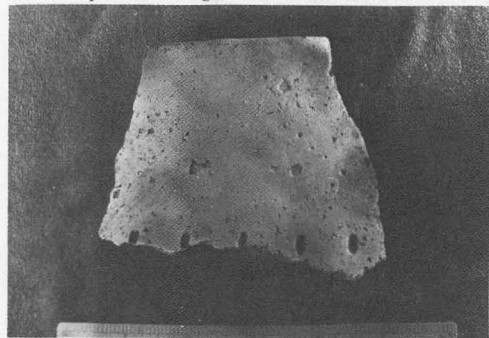


Fig. 2. Philo Punctate sherd from the same refuse pit, Philo II site, Muskingum Co., Ohio.

(Swauger 1974: Plates 28, 36, 42) incorporate virtually identical designs representing feet and legs of birds. (Brinton errs, here, incidentally, in stating that cuspidiform petroglyphs do not occur "in the rather numerous inscriptions upon the Ohio River.") Brinton argues that the median line in such petroglyphs is frequently extended beyond the juncture of the lateral lines, "thus giving the figure a cruciform appearance" or, prolonged in the other direction, the "unmistakable picture of a barbed arrow-head on a shaft." He perhaps overstates his case, as he does not give due account to the possibility that the extension may represent the rear digit (hallux) of a bird foot or track. Such certainly seems to be the case with many of the Barnesville Track Rock engravings, as well as those at Canter's Caves and elsewhere. Brinton is correct, though, in the observation that some examples have the median line extended so far as to render interpretation as bird tracks impossible. The Philo II sherd is a case in point.

An identical motif occurs on Mitchell Incised ceramics of the Over Focus (Hurt 1954) of South Dakota, where it has been interpreted as

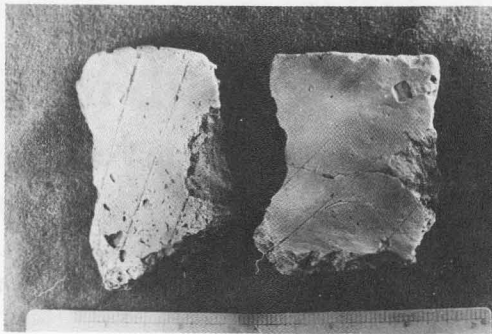


Fig. 3. Two Philo Incised rim sherds from the same refuse pit.

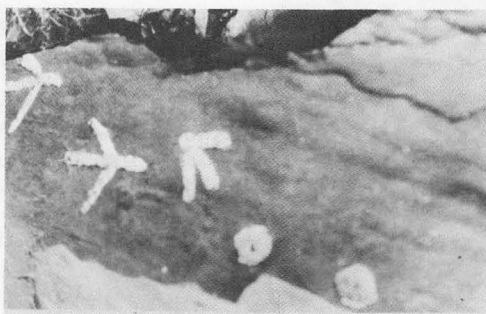


Fig. 4. Cuspidiform petroglyphs at Canter's Caves, Jackson Co., Ohio. Original snapshot in files of the Department of Archaeology, Ohio Historical Society.

representing bird tracks or "drooping corn-stalks." Presence of the hand-and-eye and weeping eye motifs on sherds of the related Mitchell Broad Trailed ceramic type indicates a relatively late date for these Over Focus ceramics as well as probable connections with areas to the south and east. While maize agriculture was present in the Philo Phase, we are not inclined to adopt Hurt's interpretation of such designs as representing corn tassels.

## Conclusions

However one interprets the design on this unusual Philo II sherd—bird track, arrow, or corn tassel—it is clear that the sherd dates to ca. A.D. 1230-1260 and that the design is essentially identical with that of Ohio Valley cuspidiform petroglyphs. Swauger (1974: 110) has concluded that Upper Ohio Valley petroglyphs generally date during the period A.D. 1200-ca. 1750 and may be attributed to Algonquian



"Monongahela Man," which he equates with "proto-Shawnee." Skirting the question of whether "proto-Shawnee" is better represented by the Fort Ancient or the Monongahela archaeological melange, we regard the Philo II sherd as independent evidence of the correctness of Swauger's estimate of the age of most Ohio Valley petroglyphs.

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JAMES L. MURPHY

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JEFF CARSKADDEN

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